

## Session Twelve Lecture Notes: Regarding the Pain of Others

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21L.435/CMS.840 - At the Limit: Violence in Contemporary Representation

Sontag, On Photography: photographs comprise an “ethics of seeing” (3)—“what we have a right to observe”

*Entwirklichung*, reality losing its realness, Haneke term, concept his films explore

### GAMES

**taxonomy** from the philosopher Roger Caillois, definition of “a game” as something that is:

**free**

**separate from other activities**

**uncertain**

**unproductive**

**governed by rules**

**and make-believe** (16).

→ It is marked by having a “**second reality**”.

Caillois groups games into categories: *agon* [ay-gone] (competitive games); *alea* [A-lea] (games of chance); *mimicry* (role-playing games); *ilinx* (games designed to produce dizziness).

Two weeks ago and last week, on *Natural Born Killers*, *Man Bites Dog*, *Reservoir Dogs* and *Oldboy*, we talked about mediation, immediacy, television, reality TV, liveness, media celebrity, and complicity. We also talked about the cartoonish, gore, the graphic, but also issues of style: color, sound, coolness; problems of the relation between words/language and the image.

This week, we turn to the very serious ethical problem of regarding the pain of others: Michael Haneke’s *Funny Games*, Elaine Scarry’s *The Body in Pain*, Susan Sontag’s *Regarding the pain of others...* and with this turn, perhaps we’re as far from the cartoonish as possible. Indeed, when this film screened at Cannes, many audience members (and famously some film critics as well) walked out; it has been described as unwatchable -- How is violence changed when we get scenes of protracted *suffering*? How does duration with (regarding) the pain of others affect (a) violence? (b) spectatorship? How is it we’ve gotten this late in a course on violence without talking seriously in depth about *pain*?

**REGARD: to notice/to take note of/to consider... but also to look, to see, but also regard (to look, to heed)**

→ *garder* "to keep watch over, guard, protect" – so also **to care**, to protect

So: the question (always) is: is there a kind of representation form that, in asking us to regard the pain of others (in the sense of gazing on it, looking at it, even concerning it) *also* compels us to *regard* the pain of others (to keep watch over it, to guard it, to protect it, to care for it)...

Ethics of representation turn on this question.

## Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*

Main Ideas:

- phenomenology of pain (in torture, in war)—unsharable, destroys language, presentness
- difficulty of expressing pain (one's own: nothing more certain; other people's: nothing more doubted)
- nature of human creation (pain as unmaking world; creation as (re)making world)

→ WHAT IS HER ACCOUNT OF THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF PAIN?

epistemology of pain: easily grasped by person experiencing it, ungraspable by other people  
“‘having pain’ may come to be thought of as the most vibrant example of what it is to ‘have certainty,’ while for the other person it is so elusive that ‘hearing about pain’ may exist as the primary model of what it is ‘to have doubt’” (4); pain: cannot be denied, cannot be confirmed

**unsharability of pain**; its **resistance to language**; pain destroys language—state before language (4)

**pain = shattering of language (RELATE TO SOUND HERE)**; different from other interior states; takes no object; resists objectification

**temporality of pain: insistent presentness (RELATE TO TIME / FREEZE)** (“most crucial fact about torture is that it *is happening*” (9))

## Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*

• revises her call in *On Photography* for an “ecology of images”—**fact is, images will not be rationed**

• compassion/empathy aroused by photographs needs to be converted into real action OR the answer is not in the real but in the staged (awaken thinking!)

“some people believe that if the horror could be made vivid enough, most people would finally take in the outrageousness, the insanity of war”; but visualizations of horror exist & violence continues

appetite for pictures of bodies in pain “as keen, almost, as the desire for ones that show bodies naked”

dimension of challenge to photos: “Just the provocation: can you look at this?”  
there is shame and shock in looking a close-up of real horror

“Perhaps the only people with the right to look at images of suffering of this extreme order are those who could do something to alleviate it... The rest of us are voyeurs....”

*On Photography*, she argued that after repeated exposure to photos of an event, it becomes less real -- photographs shrivel sympathy, neutralizes moral force

Now: she's not sure... images might be drained of force given their context (e.g., TV) but what's the alternative: only show horrors once a week? "There isn't going to be an ecology of images. No Committee of Guardians is going to ration horror, to keep fresh its ability to shock. The horrors themselves are not going to abate."

→ critique of Baudrillard/Debord—war is a spectacle to those not experiencing it; reality still very real to many

## AUDIENCE / FOURTH WALL / GAMES

### List General Aspects of GAMES:

→ What are some characteristics of a game?  
Rules, conventions  
Winners/losers  
Unserious  
Repeatable

Wittgenstein's theories of language games, which, very briefly, comes from **Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations***, and is about how **languages have their own unique rules**, and that language is an activity that should involve consenting agreement to follow those rules. So the rules themselves are mere forms, and like the rules of, say, tennis, we don't question them, we rather abide by them in order to "win the game."

Win/lose; rules; fun/trivial – GAMES IN THE FILM/FILM AS A GAME

**Games are played between entities, so they always involve relations** (zero-sum; non-zero sum; someone's gain is someone's loss); and, crucially, they involve **specific and unique rules**.

→ **Diegetic games within Haneke's films?**

Bitte / Please

Let us help you

What do you want to do (call someone? the police? ambulance? language of free choice)

Father hits them first

→ NAME as GAME (Tom/Jerry; Peter/Paul; Beavis/Butthead)

Golf ball in pocket (Why do I have it in my pocket? Well? Because I didn't hit it. I had to test the club another way.) – the hunt for the dead dog; "**Cold/Warm**" alternations

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**agon** (competition; golf); **alea** (chance; contingent encounter); **mimicry** (role-playing; masquerade); and **ilinx** (games designed to produce dizziness or loss of control: PAIN ITSELF IS THIS KIND OF GAME; state of transport/loss of self).

→ **ludic patterns** (loo-dic: derived from *ludus*, which means play) structure (and destructure)  
Golf (arrange to play with the neighbors)

## → SOCIAL POLITENESS AS A GAME

### **borrowing the eggs**

killers accuse family of playing a game

Politeness and Social Courtesy as a game (with rules, conventions, order of exchange); the obligation of friendliness; language of misunderstanding

→ The first weapon is cultural convention, politeness, avoidance of rudeness

→ inviting them in oneself

Class privilege – gives you access; presumption of innocence

Trivialness of the matter of the eggs voices the aesthetic question

(Georg: “It can’t be a matter of these ridiculous eggs.

There must be a reason”... “I can’t act as arbitrator in something in a matter I don’t know anything about.” )

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